

## Summary of Findings

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*The Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation is working to make Washington's transportation system a national model for maximizing efficiency, embracing innovation and identifying the public's top priorities. An independent, non-partisan group formed by the Governor and Legislature in 1998, the commission is conducting a thorough review of transportation in Washington. Its members are committed to asking tough questions and recommending ways to shift resources to meet top priorities. Summarized below are findings adopted on Jan. 12, 2000 that will provide the basis for the commission's recommendations for improving transportation in Washington.*



### Understanding the problems

Washington's population has grown 36 percent in the last two decades and is expected to climb another 36 percent by 2020. Population growth, increased employment, more cars and more trips are impacting Washington's roadways. Finding resources to maintain roads adequately is a major problem faced by counties and cities around the state. Highly restrictive funding processes and the great number of entities responsible for planning and coordination have led to a system that doesn't always make the most cost-effective investments. In two measures of urban congestion — percent of urban lanes congested and traffic per lane — Washington ranks among the worst in the nation.

### Recognizing the consequences

Washington's transportation system influences almost every facet of life in the state, including how we spend our time, where we live and work and the profitability of our businesses. With one in four Washington jobs dependent on international trade, maintaining an effective transportation system is vital to preserving and enhancing our economic prosperity and quality of life.

### Responding to the public

Polling results and the passage of Initiative 695 demonstrate that many Washington residents are skeptical about the efficiency of current transportation programs and funding. However, polling also demonstrates that a majority of voters believe Washington needs to maintain and improve its transportation system by increasing investments over the next five years. No specific tax option is supported by a majority of the voters, but gas taxes are considered more acceptable than other options.

### Addressing the effects of I-695

The replacement of the state's Motor Vehicle Excise Tax with a \$30 license fee eliminated a major source of funding for transportation, including funding for public transit, ferries, rail programs, and construction projects voters approved in 1998 by adopting Referendum 49. The loss of an estimated \$750 million annually in MVET revenues has created a structural gap in the state's transportation funding system. The commission's findings highlight issues critical to the commission's fulfillment of its responsibility to make effective, long-term recommendations for addressing the loss of MVET revenues.

## **Simplifying transportation governance and accountability**

While drivers may not notice when they cross from one jurisdiction to another, Washington's transportation system is a patchwork created and maintained by more than 450 governmental entities through processes that have evolved slowly over the years. There isn't always adequate coordination, and processes that once served important functions have sometimes outlived their usefulness. In some areas, the complexity of the system and the number of players suggest needs for greater simplicity and accountability.

## **Fostering greater funding flexibility**

Much of the state's funding is distributed through accounts restricted to specific uses, such as repairing roads or increasing safety. The commission is considering whether agencies and jurisdictions should be granted greater flexibility in setting funding priorities.

## **Maintaining the transportation system**

Washington's transportation system represents public assets worth more than \$100 billion. Providing sufficient maintenance to preserve these assets is an important priority. While most state highways are currently in good condition, many bridges, urban arterials, county roads and city streets are not. Many cities and counties cannot meet their basic preservation needs. Heavy vehicles, studded tires and weather contribute significantly to deterioration of roads and bridges. Washington's public transit systems, ports, waterways and rail systems also require adequate maintenance.

## **How much congestion is acceptable?**

Residents of urban areas agree there is too much congestion, but there is no consensus on what level is acceptable. Each year in Washington, congestion wastes time and resources worth more than \$2 billion. The commission is looking for ways to balance investing in building more roads with expanding public transit and reducing the number of trips people make in vehicles.

## **Identifying needs and priorities**

The more than 450 jurisdictions and agencies that shape Washington's transportation system have identified needs for the next 20 years that by will exceed funding available from current sources by billions of dollars. The state lacks consistent methods for measuring needs across jurisdictions, however, and not all entities use the best tools available for identifying the highest priorities and most cost-effective investments.

## **Reducing maintenance costs**

Transportation agencies in other states have reduced costs by establishing clear performance goals and reengineering workplace procedures to encourage frontline employees to come forward with cost-saving ideas. Another potential strategy is allowing managed competition between private companies and public-sector work teams.

## **Re-evaluating the permitting process**

Businesses, individuals and transportation agencies go through the complex process of obtaining permits before launching construction projects. The foundation exists for a thorough reform of permitting processes at both the state and local levels with the goal of protecting public interests while reducing the time and costs involved.

### **Promoting innovation and efficiency in constructing projects**

Governments around the country have saved time and money completing projects by venturing from the traditional design-bid-build process. The commission is considering a number of alternate strategies, including the design-build process, in which the same entity both designs and builds a project. Processes that promote innovation and create incentives increase the likelihood of finishing projects on time and on budget.

### **Distributing funds effectively**

The state doesn't always distribute transportation funds based on objective measures reflecting each agency or jurisdiction's actual roadway responsibilities. Basing allocations on figures such as miles of roadway, traffic volumes, population growth and the local tax base are options to look at.

### **Facing the gas tax dilemma**

State gas tax revenues — generated by collecting a flat amount for each gallon of gas purchased (regardless of the price) rather than a percentage of sales — do not keep pace with inflation.

### **Making transportation a factor in land use decisions**

Over the last 50 years, development in Washington has tended towards low-density suburbs, promoting a heavy reliance on automobiles that underlies congestion problems in most urban areas. Now, governments are looking for ways to respond to new growth regulations and growing consumer demand for compact, mixed-use developments that help reduce congestion.

### **Encouraging carpooling, transit use and bicycling**

Park-and-ride lots have proven to be a strong incentive for transit use and carpooling; many lots in congested corridors are now full. There is also demand for projects promoting bicycling as another mode of transportation that reduces congestion.